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C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 001706

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DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, S/E NATSIOS, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: NCP INSIDER TALKS ABOUT ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS WITH
SPLM

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alberto Fernandez, reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Charge Fernandez and Pol Chief met October 31 with National Congress Party (NCP) insider and Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, Dr. Sayed Al-Khateeb. Khateeb, who helped negotiate the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and is still heavily involved in representing the NCP in ongoing talks with the South, said the NCP had almost reached an agreement with the SPLM to resolve the current political crisis. He said the agreement was based on the SPLM's list of demands regarding Abyei, borders, census, elections and SAF/SPLA troop withdrawals (among others). However, he claimed the SPLM began backtracking within the last 48 hours (October 30-31) and had requested more time to resolve their own internal disputes over those who think the SPLM has gone too far, or not gone far enough, in its current confrontation with the NCP. He said President Al-Bashir would meet with Kiir when Kiir returns from Juba on Nov 2, before his visit to Washington next week. Khateeb described the SPLM as a movement in crisis since the death of John Garang, between those who want unity (GOSS President Kiir and other believers in Garang's "new Sudan" vision) and those who want independence (most of the rest of the leadership of the SPLM and its rank and file). He described Kiir as a "decent man" who is not quite up to the challenge of rebuilding the South and being a partner to the North.

¶2. (C) Khateeb said President Al-Bashir had told GOSS President and GNU First Vice President Salva Kiir very clearly that there will not be another war in Southern Sudan. "The NCP will never go back to war," he insisted. However, Khateeb said the NCP needs reassurance that the SPLM is not seeking to gain advantage on Abyei with an eye toward independence. "If the SPLM is for unity, the Abyei issue will go away and can be resolved rapidly," claimed Khateeb. But if the SPLM is already bent on independence before the 2011 referendum is even held, "then why should we be so flexible with what will be international borders." He added that, "if they show us they want to be our partner and go beyond the CPA for the good of all, we can be partners."

¶3. (C) With a wry smile, Khateeb recalled the ABBA song from the early 1980's, saying he hoped the SPLM would "Take a Chance on Me" and begin to have more trust in the NCP. They need to work with us, urged Khateeb. He said the ABC (Abyei Boundary Commission) exceeded its mandate, was arbitrary and was not based on history. If the NCP and the SPLM are not able to resolve Abyei, he said, the NCP is open to

arbitration, including by the US. Khateeb said the GNU recognized the need for a strong SPLM and requested that the US advise Kiir to work with the NCP to resolve the problem. "The two partners should figure out how to move forward and manage the elections," Khateeb observed.

¶4. (C) Charge advised Khateeb that if the NCP is truly interested in a strong SPLM, then the NCP should not have raided the SPLM headquarters in September, and the current dispute over the SPLM request to remove Lam Akol as Foreign Minister should have been resolved quickly. Khateeb freely admitted that the NCP had overreached on both these issues and that NCP head Nafie Ali Nafie's apology for the raid "had been spoiled by clumsy words by the Minister of Interior." He attributed this to linger Khartoum police anger for 2005 rioting in the city by Southerners when John Garang died "and dozens of Northerners, including school girls, were burned alive" by distraught Southerners. "So there is still bad blood between the police here and the SPLM," he admitted.

¶5. (C) Comment: While the NCP may recognize the benefit from working with the SPLM toward elections (which would increase the NCP's credibility and legitimacy) the NCP simultaneously seeks to gain incremental advantage by manipulating the CPA for partisan advantage and playing mind games with an increasingly angry SPLM. Still, Khateeb is an able NCP loyalist who has still not given up on the promise of the CPA and true partnership with the SPLM. The suggestion of arbitration may be genuine and could be requested by Kiir during his visit to Washington next week if the two parties are not able to resolve the current political crisis before then.

FERNANDEZ